Teaching with Primary Sources

American Memory is an online gateway to rich primary source materials relating to the history and culture of the United States. The site offers more than 20 million digital items from more than 130 historical collections. The collections can be found at http://memory.loc.gov.

In the coming years, the National Digital Library Program plans to digitize more of the Library's unique American history collections and make them freely available to teachers, students, and the general public over the Internet. Special collections to be digitized include the documents, films, manuscripts, photographs, and sound recordings that tell the American story.

The Library of Congress Teaching with Primary Sources program is designed to train in-service and pre-service classroom teachers, media specialists, and university faculty to access, use, and produce curriculum utilizing the Internet and the digitized primary source materials from the collections of the Library of Congress.

“... [We] want to share our resources with the American people, who, through their elected representation in Congress, have created the world's largest repository of knowledge.”

Dr. James Billington, Librarian of Congress
Introduction to Digital Primary Sources from the Library of Congress

Objectives:

Participants will:

• Determine the value of teaching and learning with primary sources.

• Navigate the Library of Congress website.

• Explore digital primary resources at the Library of Congress.
The Library of Congress Home Page

www.loc.gov

Introduction to Digital Primary Sources at the Library of Congress
What is a Primary Source?

Simply put, primary sources are the original items or records that have survived from the past – such as clothing, letters, photographs, and manuscripts. They were part of a direct personal experience of a time or event. The online collections of the Library of Congress American Memory project are comprised of primary sources. For the purpose of contrast, it is important to note that secondary sources are created by documenting or analyzing someone else’s experience to provide a perspective or framework of a past event. They may have been written long after an event took place and include items such as textbooks, encyclopedias, biographies, and documentaries.
Sample Primary Sources from the Library of Congress

Copyright deposit; Haines Photo Co.; July 29, 1914; DLC/PP-1914:44823.
Copyright claimant’s address: Conneaut, O.
Campus buildings labeled on image.

The First American West Special Collections Research Center,
University of Chicago Library

Ulysses S. Grant’s commission as lieutenant general signed by Abraham Lincoln, 10 March 1864.
(Ulysses S. Grant Papers)
Why Would I Use a Primary Source in Teaching and Learning Activities?

For years, historians and educators across the curriculum have understood the value of primary sources in K-12 education. Two key reasons for including primary sources in the curriculum are:

1. Primary sources expose students to multiple perspectives on great issues of the past and present. The human experience, after all, deals with matters that were furiously debated by the participants. Interpretations of the past are furiously debated as well, among historians, policy makers, politicians, and ordinary citizens. By working with primary sources, students can become involved in these debates.

2. Primary sources help students develop knowledge, skills, and analytical abilities. By dealing directly with primary sources, students engage in asking questions, thinking critically, making intelligent inferences, and developing reasoned explanations and interpretations of events and issues in the past and present. Primary sources also often provide a real-life framework to apply skills learned in the classroom. For example, using a chart documenting production from a copper mine in Bryson City, NC, students can calculate information such as profits and losses, and cycles of production.
Primary sources are snippets of history. They are incomplete and often come without context. They require students to be analytical, to examine sources thoughtfully and to determine what else they need to know to make inferences from the materials.

A high school student states, “I learned that in order to do history, one must be objective and be able to look at a puzzle of historical events and put them together in order.”

Local history projects require students to “tell their own stories” about familiar people, events, and places. Memories from an adults’ perspective provide a rich glimpse of history that is not available in a textbook. What evolves is the sense that world history is also personal family history, which provides a compelling context for student understanding.

An elementary/middle school teacher reports that “… finding information about topics that are of importance to our local history is invaluable. Students are excited by the fact that our local history is archived nationally. This gives their immediate cultural area importance in their eyes.

Primary sources help students relate in a personal way to events of the past coming away with a deeper understanding of history as a series of human events.

A high school teacher reported that, “In sharing the Whitman hospital letters, I clearly saw a sheen of tears in students’ eyes and noted an avid interest in Civil War soldiers as ‘people’ not simply as pallid historical figures.
In analyzing primary sources, students move from concrete observations and facts to making inferences about the materials. “Points of view” is one of the most important inferences that can be drawn. What is the intent of the speaker, of the photographer, of the musician? How does that color one’s interpretation or understanding of the evidence?

A high school teacher states that, “Discovering that two people seeing the same primary source differently creates a kind of dissonance that opens up the meaning of the source and creates new understanding in learners”

It is difficult for students to understand that we all participate in making history everyday, that each of us in the course of our lives leave behind primary source documentation that scholars years hence may examine as a record of “the past.” The immediacy of first-person accounts of events is compelling to most students.

“Comparisons of events of the past to events our are students are engaged in daily helps to bring “history” to the present and make it ‘live’ for our students.”
American Memory is an online gateway to rich primary resources relating to the history and culture of the United States. The site offers more than 20 million digital items from more than 130 collections. Collections include documents, films, manuscripts, photographs, and sound recordings that chronicle historical events, people, places and ideas that continue to shape America and serve the public as resource for education and lifelong learning.

- Click on More browse options to search by Topic, Time Period, Collections Containing and Place
Exhibitions are online exhibits that highlight a specific theme or topic. These special collections allow you to take a virtual tour of the treasures housed at the Library of Congress without having to leave your classroom.

The richness and variety of the Library’s exhibitions reflect the universal and diverse nature of the Library’s collections. Four major themes underlie most of the exhibitions—the presentation of great libraries and written traditions; the exploration of America’s past and character; the examination of world cultures and history; and the celebration of events, individuals, and works that shaped the twentieth century and beyond.

Millions of items are waiting for you—explore, discover, and be inspired.

- Click on All Exhibitions to browse the list of current and past exhibitions.
Thomas is the area of the Library of Congress website that has information on current and past legislation and current activity on the House and Senate Floors. THOMAS makes federal legislative information freely available to the public. You can search by word/phrase, bill number or specific legistor.

Thomas includes many resources and activities for teachers to use in their classrooms.

- Click on For Teachers to browse resources available for teachers.
World Digital Library is a cooperative project of the Library of Congress, the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), and partner libraries, archives, and educational and cultural institutions from the United States and around the world. The project brings together on a single website rare and unique documents – books, journals, manuscripts, maps, prints and photographs, films, and sound recordings – that tell the story of the world’s cultures.

The site is intended for general users, students, teachers, and scholars.

You can search by Place, Time, Topic, Type of Item or Institution and in a variety of languages.

- Click on an area of the world to begin exploring these treasures.
The Veterans History Project of the American Folklife Center collects, preserves, and makes accessible the personal accounts of American war veterans so that future generations may hear directly from veterans and better understand the realities of war. You will find personal narratives, correspondence and visual materials (photographs, drawings and scrapbooks) representing veterans from WWI to the present.

- Click on Search the Veterans Collections to begin
This area of the Library of Congress includes resources, information and activities that would be of interest to kids, parents, and teachers.

Our Favorites!

- America’s Library
- America’s Story
- Read.gov
- Classic Books
- Author Webcasts
- Everyday Mysteries
The Teachers Page is an online resource created especially for teachers. It includes lesson plans, themed resources, and primary source sets that are ready to use in your classroom. It also includes strategies on finding and citing digital primary sources and information on Copyright and Fair Use issues.

www.loc.gov/teachers

- Use the links on the left to navigate The Teachers Page.
Classroom Materials
- Lessohn Plans
- Themed Resources
- Primary Source Sets
- Presentations & Activities
- Collection Connections

Professional Development
- Library-Facilitated Training
- TPS Direct
- Self-Directed

TPS Partners
- TPS Program

Using Primary Sources
- Why Use Primary Sources
- Citing Primary Sources
- Copyright and Primary Sources
- Finding Primary Sources
- Teacher’s Guides and Analysis Tools

News and Events
- News and Events at LOC and other Places

Additional Resources
- Slide Shows/Handouts
- Resources from Outside the Library
- Class Starters
- More Library Resources
Webcasts allow visitors to view presentations from dozens of their favorite authors, poets and storytellers as well as speakers from a variety of fields including, science, technology, religion, government etc. New Webcasts are added on a regular basis.

From the Library of Congress homepage, click on More Webcasts.

Click on one of the 10 Most Popular Webcasts.
Explore & Discover

Today in History is a Library of Congress presentation of historic facts highlighted by items from the American Memory collections. Travel back in time by visiting the Today in History and using the archives to search for specific information by topic or date.

In this section you can search by full text, day and month.
In 2. Jump to a specific day in the archive.

• Choose your birthday month and day.
• Click Go to find the results.
The Wise Guide portal was designed to introduce you to the many fascinating, educational and useful resources available from the nation's library and one of the most popular websites of the federal government. The “Wise Guide” will be refreshed monthly, much like a magazine, offering links to the best of the Library's online offerings. Each of the “articles” is based on items contained in a collection, database, reading room or other area of the Library's online offerings.
The Library’s new, personalized site, my.LOC.gov, presents many of these items in compelling online exhibitions that reveal our nation’s history, knowledge and creativity through primary sources, engaging activities and materials for teachers and students.

The web site provides the ability to take a virtual tour of the art and architecture located throughout the Library’s magnificent Thomas Jefferson building. Web visitors can play Knowledge Quest, an interactive learning treasure hunt, and access educational activities and materials for students and teachers related to the exhibition content.

**Experience myLOC.gov!**

- Collect your favorite treasures
- Turn the pages of rare manuscripts.
- Interact with priceless artifacts.
- Tour the magnificent Thomas Jefferson Building.
- Explore educational activities.

- Click on one of the tabs to begin
The **Prints and Photographs** collections include photographs, prints, drawings, posters, and architectural and engineering drawings. The Prints and Photographs Online Catalog holds items that are not located in American Memory, but some collections can be found in both places. Not all images displayed in this catalog are in the public domain, in some collections only thumbnail images are displayed.

- Type in your search term or browse the **Featured Collections** on the page.
Ask a Librarian

- Click on \textbf{ASK A LIBRARIAN} in the menu bar at the top
- Select the area that you need assistance
- Click on \textbf{ASK A LIBRARIAN ONLINE}
- Type in the required information and your question.
Navigating the Library of Congress
Can You Find It?

Name:

The following activity is designed to help you navigate the Library of Congress web site and to locate a small sample of the many resources available. After completing each section, return to the main page of the LOC.

Exhibitions
Explore an Exhibit on a topic taught at your grade level

- Go to www.loc.gov
- Click on the Exhibitions tab and then click on GO
- Click on All Exhibitions on the left
- Click on the letter D
- Click on The Dream of Flight
- Click on Exhibition Overview
- Read through the Overview
- On what date did Wilbur and Orville Wright make the world's first sustained flight?

In what year was the first free aerial voyage in a Montgolfier hot-air balloon?

Global Gateway

- Click on the tab World Digital Library and then click on GO
- Click on Global Gateway: Multilingual resources on world culture from the Library of Congress
- Click on Portals to the World
- Click on Canada
- Click on the World Factbook link under the Map
- Select Canada from the Select a Country or Location drop down menu

What is the population of Canada?

Now find the population of Mexico and the United States.

Mexico

United States

Kids & Family

- Click on America’s Library
- Click on Explore the States
- Click on a state

Where does this state's name come from?
**Teachers**
- Click on Teachers
- Click on Using Primary Sources
- Read through the information on this page.
- List one question you think is important to engage students with primary sources.

**Wise Guide**
- Click on Wise Guide to loc.gov
- Read one article from the current Wise Guide

List one interesting fact you learned from this article.

**Today in History**
- Click on Today in History
- Click on Archives
- Using option 2, select your birth date and click Go

List one event that happened on this date.

**Everyday Mysteries**
- Click on Kids and Families
- Click on Everyday Mysteries
- Click on Browse Other Questions
- Choose a topic from the list and click on a question

What did you learn?

**American Memory**
- Click on American Memory
- Click on More Browse Options
- Click on Photos, Prints on the right side
- Type school house in the Search Selected Collections
- Click on Gallery View
- Choose a photo from the search

What collection is your photo from?